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Judge nominee admits Redskins owner's gift

By Bill Gertz
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CIA General Counsel Stanley Sporkin testified yesterday that he received \$1,700 worth of services from Washington Redskins football team owner Jack Kent Cooke several years after Mr. Cooke had been the subject of a Securities and Exchange Commission investigation that Mr. Sporkin directed while SEC enforcement chief.

Mr. Sporkin made the admission during the first open session of Senate Judiciary Committee hearings on Mr. Sporkin's qualifications to sit on the federal bench.

A committee spokesman said the committee agreed to vote on the nomination tomorrow.

Earlier yesterday, the committee held a closed session — its sixth in the last three months on the nomination — that focused on Mr. Sporkin's role in a 1984 leak that alerted a senior CIA official that he was under investigation.

In opening remarks before the hearing, Sen. Jeremiah Denton, Alabama Republican, said the Senate investigation of Mr. Sporkin was prompted by FBI officials who urged a review of "Mr. Sporkin's involvement in the case regarding a sensitive FBI investigation of a former senior CIA employee."

Senate conservatives have held up the nomination for 18 months to investigate what role, if any, Mr. Sporkin played in shielding a CIA national intelligence officer during a Justice Department investigation of leaks of classified CIA data to a Middle East affairs newsletter.

Under questioning from Mr. Denton, Mr. Sporkin acknowledged accepting an all-expenses-paid trip to the 1983 Super Bowl in Tampa, Fla., which Mr. Sporkin estimated to be worth about \$1,200. But he denied accepting \$100 in "walking around money" during the trip.

Mr. Sporkin said he also has accepted free tickets to 10 Washington Redskins football games from Mr. Cooke since 1981.

He defended himself, saying "there are no dealings between Mr. Cooke and the CIA" and that he did not think it was improper for a government employee to accept the free travel, lodging and football tickets.

Earlier he told the panel that during his tenure as SEC enforcement chief, it had been a strict policy not to accept any gratuities.

Regarding the SEC investigation of a business in which Mr. Cooke shared an interest, Mr. Sporkin said the investigation was conducted "in the early 1970s."

During the investigation, "I don't think I ever met the man," Mr. Sporkin said.

Other questions of impropriety raised by Mr. Denton included allegations that Mr. Sporkin, while CIA counsel, asked the Securities and Exchange Commission to investigate a newsletter published by a former CIA official, a request by Mr. Sporkin to review sealed grand jury transcripts of the case against fugitive financier Robert Vesco, and the release of details of an SEC investigation to the Internal Revenue Service that "compromised" a key witness during a 1977 court case in New Orleans.

Mr. Denton, in an interview after the hearing, said the Sporkin investigation has produced "so many contradictory sworn statements" that a subsequent perjury investigation may follow the nomination hearings.

Sen. Paul Simon, Illinois Democrat, said at the start of yesterday's open hearing that from the evidence presented during the hearings, "there is no basis for holding up the nomination."

"What we do have . . . is some disagreement between the FBI and CIA, and Mr. Sporkin got caught in the middle," Mr. Simon said.

Asked if all the questions concerning his nomination had been answered, Mr. Sporkin told reporters, "I hope so."